

Message Text

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ACTION INR-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 CIAE-00 NSAE-00 RSC-01 DRC-01

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R 301747Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 952

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 3633

E. O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: PINR

SUBJECT: BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON ANDRE OLEFFE, MINISTER FOR
ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

REF: STATE 87267

1. SUMMARY. MINISTER FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS SINCE APRIL 1974 IN THE TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT, REPLACING WILLY CLAES, ANDRE OLEFFE STANDS OUT AS ONE OF THE MORE IMPORTANT AND INFLUENTIAL MEMBERS OF THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT, ALONG WITH VANDEN BOEYNANTS (DEFENSE), VAN ELSLANDE (FOREIGN AFFAIRS) AND DE CLERCQ (FINANCE). UNLIKE MOST CABINET MINISTERS OLEFFE IS NOT A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT. IT IS POLITICALLY HELPFUL TO TINDEMANS THAT OLEFFE IS A WALLONIAN, IN A GOVERNMENT IN WHICH FLEMINGS PREDOMINATE, AND THAT HE HAS LONG BEEN ACTIVE IN THE TRADE UNION -ORINETED CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC WING OF THE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN (PSC) PARTY. HIS APPOINTMENT, HOWEVER, OWES MORE TO HIS REPUTATION FOR TECHNICAL COMPETENCE. IN HIS FIRST MONTHS IN OFFICE. HE FACES THREE CHALLENGES OF DESCENDING MAGNITUDE: CONTROL OF INFLATION, COPING WITH ENERGY PROBLEMS AND PARTICULARLY THE PROBLEM OF GASOLINE AND OIL PRICES, AND COPING WITH THE TROUBLESOME PRESENCE OF THE SOCIALIST SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE MINISTRY FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, ANDRE BAEYENS. END SUMMARY.

2. PERSONAL AND FAMILY DATA. SEE BRUSSELS A-755 OF JUNE 8, 1967. OLEFFE WAS BORN ON MAY 10, 1914 AT COURT-ST. ETIENNE, BETWEEN WAVRE AND NIVELLES IN BRABANT PROVINCE. HE IS A FRENCH-SPEAKING
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WALLONIAN CATHOLIC. HIS FATER WAS A WORKER WHO WAS POLITICALLY

ACTIVE IN THE CATHOLIC WORKER MOVEMENT. OLEFFE HAS A DEGREE IN COMMERCIAL ENGINEERING FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF BRUSSELS (SOLVAY INSTITUTE). HIS WIFE REPORTEDLY IS AILING AND AVOIDS SOCIAL LIFE. OLEFFE SPEAKS GOOD DUTCH AND SOME ENGLISH. HE HAS A DISTINGUISHED APPEARANCE, A PLEASANT PUBLIC MANNER, AND THE ABILITY TO SPEAK LUCIDLY. BY TEMPERAMENT HE SEEMS CHEERFUL AND OPTIMISTIC. POSSESSING A STRONG WILL AND A SHARP MANNER WITHIN HIS OFFICE, HE REPUTEDLY PREFERS QUIET NEGOTIATION TO CONFRONTATION.

3. OTHER POSITIONS AND ACTIVITIES. BETWEEN 1945 AND 1974, OLEFFE WAS ACTIVE CONCURRENTLY AS A DIRECTOR OF THE BELGIAN BANKING COMMISSION, AS DIRECTOR GENERAL AFTER 1962 AND AS PRESIDENT IN 1973, AND AS A LEADING OFFICIAL OF THE CHRISTIAN WORKER MOVEMENT (MOUVEMENT OUVRIER CHRETIEN), AS PRESIDENT FOR WALLONIA 1953-73. THE BANKIND COMMISSION SUPERVISES THE ACTIVITIES OF BELGIAN BANKS AND STOCK BROKERS. HE HAS BEEN ON OF BELGIUM'S LEADING EXPERTS IN MATTERS OF FISCAL AND TAX REFORM. HIS CAREER INVOLVED PARTICULARLY CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH THE PROBLEMS OF THE BELGIAN CONGO (1960-63) AND WITH THE MORE RECENT FORMATION OF THE WALLONIAN UNIVERSITY OF LOUVAIN AT OTTIGNIES (ALSO KNOWN AS LOUVAIN LA NEUVE) WHERE HE SERVED AS MAYOR IN 1973.

4. UNUSUAL STATURE. TO ALL EVIDENCE AND REPORT, OLEFFE ENJOYS THE CONFIDENCE OF THE KING, AND THE RESPECT OF THE BELGIAN FINANCIAL WORLD AND THE BELGIAN INDUSTRIAL MANAGEMENT DOMMUNITY. IN THE EARLY 1960'S HIS IDEAS ON FISCAL REFORM WERE CONSIDERED RADICAL BY THE CONTROLLING ELEMENTS IN THE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY UNDER THEO LEFEVRE, BUT HIS IDEAS PROVED SUFFICIENTLY ATTRACTIVE TO BE ENACTED INTO LAW IN 1962 DESPITE CONSERVATIVE RESERVATIONS. CONSERVATIONS IN THE BANKING AND BUSINESS WORLD ARE SAID TO RESPECT HIM, AS NOTED ABOVE, BUT ALSO TO FEAR HIM. THE SAME ATTITUDE TOWARDS OLEFFE IS ATTRIBUTED TO SOCIALIST PARTY LEADERS. THE NET RESULT IS THAT OLEFFE IS RESPECTED AS BEING HIS OWN MAN.

5. VIEWS. OLEFFE CAN BE EXPECTED TO TAKE PRAGMATIC POSITIONS WITH A MINIMUM OF GRANDSTANDING FOR PURPOSES OF POPULARITY OR PARTISAN POLITICS. ONE OF HIS FIRST TASKS HAS BEEN TO APPROVE AND TO JUSTIFY IN THE FACE OF PARTISAN SOCIALIST PARTY CRITICISM

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NEW HIGHER PRICES FOR PETROLEUM AND GASOLINE. HIS ANTI-INFLATION POLICIES ARE LIKELY TO LEAN TO WARD MONETARY CONTROLS AT A TIME WHEN THE RATE OF INFLATION, 1.8 PERCENT FOR THE MONTH OF MAY, CONTINUES TO TROUBLE THE COUNTRY.

6. AS OF 1963 IN HIS TALKS WITH EMBASSY OFFICERS, OLEFFE DESCRIBED EXTREME FEDERALISM AS UNWORKABLE IN BELGIUM. HE SAW BELGIAN COMMON SENSE AS PREVAILING IN THE ULTIMATE RESOLUTION

OF SUCH KEY PROBLEMS AS THE STATUS OF BRUSSELS. SAYING THAT BELGIAN CATHOLIC AND SOCIALIST ADVERSARIES WOULD ULTIMATELY HELP EACH OTHER IN ANY SERIOUS CRISIS, OLEFFE COMMENTED BELGIUM SHOULD BE LIKENED TO A LARGE HOUSEHOLD FULL OF QUARRELLING MEMBERS OF ONE FAMILY WHO OFTEN SHOUT AND CURSE AT EACH OTHER BUT WHEN THREATENED, REGROUP AS ONE FAMILY AND HELP EACH OTHER.

7. DURING MAY, OLEFFE HAS VOICED FAVOR FOR: PORT IMPROVEMENT AT ANTWERP; PETROCHEMICAL COMPLEX IN THE LIEGE REGION; PROMOTING INVESTMENT IN THE SERVICES SECTOR AND IN INDUSTRIES THAT REQUIRE RELATIVELY LIMITED WATER AND ENERGY.

8. EUROPEAN COMMUNITY AND THE US. HIS REMARKS TO EMBASSY OFFICERS ON THE EC IN EARLIER YEARS SHOWED HIM AS SYMPATHETIC TO ITS OBJECTIVES, SKEPTICAL AS TO BRITISH READINESS TO ADAPT TO EC INSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL COMMITMENTS, MYSTIFIED BY THE INCONSISTENCIES OF FRENCH TACTICS. OLEFFE IS NOT KNOWN TO HAVE VISITED THE US. IN THE MID-1969'S HIS RELATIONS WITH EMBASSY OFFICERS WERE FRIENDLY AND CORDIAL AND DURING A RECENT COURTESY CALL BY THE AMBASSADOR, THE SAME SPIRIT PREVAILED. BOOCHEVER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION, CABINET, PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 30 MAY 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974BRUSSE03633
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X2
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740136-1076
From: BRUSSELS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t1974058/aaaaagxl.tel
Line Count: 136
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION INR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: STATE 87267
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 01 APR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <01 APR 2002 by cunninfx>; APPROVED <13 JUN 2002 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON ANDRE OLEFFE, MINISTER FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS
TAGS: PINR, BE, (OLEFFE, ANDRE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005